

John Tzetzes as Didactic Poet and Learned Grammarian

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Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the scholarly and didactic oeuvre of John Tzetzes is his strong authorial presence: Tzetzes is notorious for including autobiographical information, emphasizing his own erudition, and criticizing other scholars and grammarians. One might call this vain, arrogant, or quarrelsome—and scholars have often done so.¹ Recent studies, however, explore Tzetzes' self-assertiveness and polemical attitude against the background of the competitive intellectual and educational milieu in which he was active. Rather than dismissing his attitude as a fault of character, they study, for instance, the rationale behind the many autobiographical passages in the *Histories*,² or focus on the recurring motifs and rhetorical devices in his polemical remarks against schedographers.³ Tying in

with these studies, the present article examines Tzetzes and his didactic work as part of the competitive—and changing—educational world of twelfth-century Constantinople.⁴ It explores Tzetzes' ideas on good grammar education and the ideal grammarian, as exemplified by his own work and person.

Tzetzes was one of the most prolific producers of the didactic poetry that flourished in the twelfth century.⁵ His verse offers much information on his teaching persona as well as on the pedagogic philosophy governing his work. This article's first section outlines the framework for a discussion of Tzetzes' didactic verse and grammar teaching by briefly reflecting on the interface between poetry and education. The second section consults little-studied didactic poems by

1 See, for instance, N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London, 1983), 190, 192. On Tzetzes' authorial presence, see also F. Budelmann, "Classical Commentary in Byzantium: John Tzetzes on Ancient Greek Literature," in *The Classical Commentary: History, Practices, Theory*, ed. R. K. Gibson and C. Shuttleworth Kraus (Leiden, 2002), 141–69, esp. 148–53.

2 A. Pizzone, "The *Historiai* of John Tzetzes: A Byzantine 'Book of Memory'?", *BMGS* 41.2 (2017): 182–207; eadem, "The Autobiographical Subject in Tzetzes' *Chiliades*: An Analysis of Its Components," in *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images*, ed. C. Messis, M. Mullett, and I. Nilsson (Uppsala, 2018), 287–304.

3 P. A. Agapitos, "John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners: A Byzantine Teacher on Schedography, Everyday Language and Writerly Disposition," *Medioevo Greco* 17 (2017): 1–57, esp. 7–27. For criticism of contemporary schedography by Anna Komnene and

Eustathios of Thessalonike, see P. A. Agapitos, "Anna Komnene and the Politics of Schedographic Training and Colloquial Discourse," *Néa Pólyh* 10 (2013): 89–107; and idem, "Literary *Haute Cuisine* and Its Dangers: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Schedography and Everyday Language," *DOP* 69 (2015): 225–42.

4 On education in twelfth-century Byzantium, see esp. I. Nesseris, "Η παιδεία στην Κωνσταντινούπολη κατά τον 12^ο αιώνα" (PhD diss., University of Ioannina, 2014), with a discussion of Tzetzes' teaching activities at 158–97; on grammar education, see pp. 225–50.

5 The production of didactic poetry also flourished in the Western medieval world during the same period: see T. Haye, *Das lateinische Lehrgedicht im Mittelalter: Analyse einer Gattung* (Leiden, 1997), 359–97; J. M. Ziolkowski, "From Didactic Poetry to Bestselling Textbooks in the Long Twelfth Century," in *Calliope's Classroom: Studies in Didactic Poetry from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. M. A. Harder, A. A. MacDonald, and G. J. Reinink (Paris, 2007), 221–43.

Tzetzes to explore his teacherly persona and his ideas on grammar teaching. These ideas show up as well in various polemical passages in which Tzetzes criticizes other grammarians, and schedographers more specifically, for their ignorance of the rules of prosody.⁶ The article's third section then explores what these criticisms reveal about what, in Tzetzes' opinion, makes a good grammarian and why it is imperative to learn the rules of grammar.

Poets and/as Teachers

The educational value of poetry has been the subject of debate since antiquity. Plato's famous rejection in the *Republic* of Homer as the "educator of the Greeks" prompted many defenses of the didacticism of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and of poetry more generally, as, for instance, in Plutarch's *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* and Pseudo-Plutarch's encyclopedic *Life and Poetry of Homer*.⁷ Similar issues were central to the debate on the role of ancient (pagan) literature in an increasingly Christian society, as notably discussed in Basil the Great's *Address to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature*, which was inspired by Plutarch's aforementioned treatise. Much like Basil, twelfth-century scholars such as John Tzetzes and Eustathios of Thessalonike advocated the educational usefulness (ὠφέλεια) of ancient literature in general and Homeric poetry in particular; this position served to justify their own exegetical work as much as the study of Homer,⁸ whose centrality in the Byzantine curriculum had remained unchanged in the centuries between Basil and Tzetzes.

The idea that poetry made learning easy by virtue of its mythical content—which was already found in,

for instance, Strabo and Plutarch—frequently recurs in discussions of Homer in Eustathios and Tzetzes.⁹ Both repeatedly return to the perennial topos of Homer as the source of all learning: his poetry gives instruction in every virtue, contains many grammatical and rhetorical lessons, and abounds in "every kind of art and branch of knowledge."¹⁰ For Tzetzes and Eustathios, moreover, the ancient comic and tragic poets were as much teachers as Homer, their works providing examples of morally good and bad behavior for the edification of the audience.¹¹ Both considered it their task to identify and elucidate lessons intentionally included by the ancient poets in their works; as exegetes they presented themselves as the mouthpieces of the ancient poet-teachers in a "transhistorical mingling of pedagogical voices."¹² Homer, then, becomes a didactic poet as much as Hesiod, whose *Works and Days* is commonly considered the first didactic poem of Greek literature.¹³

While it is clear that Byzantine scholars considered a pedagogical function inherent in the poetry (and prose) of the past, the relation between didacticism and

9 On myth as bait for the young student, see, e.g., P. Cesaretti, *Allegoristi di Omero a Bisanzio: Ricerche ermeneutiche (XI–XII secolo)* (Milan, 1991), 152–54 (for Tzetzes), 232–33 (for Eustathios). See also B. van den Berg, "Homer and Rhetoric in Byzantium: Eustathios of Thessalonike on the Composition of the *Iliad*" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 44–59 with further refs.

10 Eustathios, *Commentary on the Iliad* 1.30 = 1.2.7, ed. M. van der Valk, 4 vols. (Leiden, 1971–1987): τεχνῶν ὅλως παντοίων καὶ ἐπιστημῶν. For Eustathios, see *Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, vol. 1: *On Rhapsodies A–B*, ed. E. Cullhed (Uppsala, 2016), 11*–17*; and van den Berg, "Homer and Rhetoric in Byzantium," 22–33, 44–59. For Tzetzes, see, e.g., *Allegories of the Iliad* 15.37–41, 20.33–38, ed. J. F. Boissonade (Paris, 1851); *Exegesis of the Iliad* 45.8–9, 343.12–15, ed. M. Papathomopoulos (Athens, 2007). For poets as teachers more generally, see *Exegesis of the Iliad* 53.10–17, 71.19–20, ed. Papathomopoulos.

11 See B. van den Berg, "Playwright, Atticist, Satirist: The Reception of Aristophanes in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?*, ed. P. Marciniak and I. Nilsson (Leiden, forthcoming); and eadem, "The Excellent Man Lies Sometimes": Eustathios of Thessalonike on Good Hypocrisy, Praiseworthy Falsehood, and Rhetorical Plausibility in Ancient Poetry," *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3 (2017): 15–35, at 17–22. On ancient drama in the Byzantine school, see also P. Marciniak, *Greek Drama in Byzantine Times* (Katowice, 2004), 41–58.

12 Cullhed, *On Rhapsodies A–B*, 12*.

13 On *Works and Days* as the beginning of Greek didactic poetry, see, e.g., P. Toohey, *Epic Lessons: An Introduction to Ancient Didactic Poetry* (Abingdon, UK, and New York, 1996), 20–34.

6 On schedography and the changing world of grammar education in the twelfth century, see, e.g., F. Ronconi, "Quelle gram maire à Byzance? La circulation des textes grammaticaux et son reflet dans les manuscrits," in *La produzione scritta tecnica e scientifica nel medioevo: Libro e documento tra scuole e professioni*, ed. G. De Gregorio and M. Galante (Spoleto, 2012), 63–110, at 90–91 with further refs. On schedography in general, see esp. F. Nousia, *Byzantine Textbooks of the Palaeologan Period* (Vatican City, 2016), 52–92.

7 On Homer as the source of all learning in antiquity, see, e.g., W. J. Verdenius, *Homer, the Educator of the Greeks* (Amsterdam, 1970); M. Hillgruber, *Die pseudoplutarchische Schrift De Homero*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1994–1999), 1:4–35.

8 For a similar idea, see B. van den Berg, "The Wise Poet and His Erudite Commentator: Eustathios' Imagery in the Proem of the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*," *BMGS* 41, no. 1 (2017): 30–44.

Byzantine poetry has been a topic of debate. Poetry in the technically challenging ancient meters is generally considered a literary tour de force that proves an author a credible member of the guild of literati.¹⁴ Yet some texts might be written as literary showpieces and (later) serve a didactic function.¹⁵ In the scholia to his *Carmina Iliaca*, for instance, a literary showpiece in hexameter, John Tzetzes explicitly expresses his didactic intentions: his aim is to provide young students with a concise panorama of the Trojan War.¹⁶ The poem is thus an artistic production in its own right as well as a vehicle for many lessons in Homeric poetry and grammar more generally.¹⁷

While it is often difficult for the modern reader to decide whether any given text served a teaching purpose,¹⁸ similar problems concern its literary ambition. This applies especially to texts with a strong didactic thrust and written in Byzantine accentual meters, in particular in political verse, a meter considered

easy to compose in and to understand or memorize.¹⁹ Authors such as Michael Psellos and John Tzetzes repeatedly underscore that they have chosen a clear and simple style for pedagogical reasons: they intended to transmit potentially difficult subject matter in a more easily comprehensible way.²⁰ Modern aesthetic sensibilities have led to negative evaluations of ancient and Byzantine didactic poetry alike, as “it is often seen to inhabit a space between poetry and technical prose to which our contemporary tastes are unaccustomed.”²¹ This has raised the question of whether didactic verse in a Byzantine context can even be considered poetry: does versification suffice to render a text poetry or are certain literary aesthetics required?²² While Psellos’s didactic poems in political verse on grammar and rhetoric appear to lack any literary pretensions, Constantine Manasses’ *Synopsis Chronike*, also in political verse, shares many features with didactic poems (including an explicit intention to teach) and is highly literary at the same time, with its rhetorical *ekphraseis*, creative use of language, and elaborate narrative techniques.²³ It seems therefore impossible to draw a clear line between poetry and verse, and between didactic intent and literary ambition. It would, perhaps, be more productive to speak of a didactic mode as part of the literary culture of any given period, as in Byzantine perception all such texts equally belonged to the realm of *logoi*. Such a didactic mode transcends boundaries between genres and between prose and verse, and can be present in

14 See, e.g., E. M. Jeffreys, “Why Produce Verse in Twelfth-Century Constantinople?,” in *Doux remède . . . : Poésie et poétique à Byzance*, ed. P. Odorico, P. A. Agapitos, and M. Hinterberger (Paris, 2009), 219–28, esp. 225–28. On poetic production in the twelfth century, see also N. Zagklas, “How Many Verses Shall I Write and Say?: Poetry in the Komnenian Period (1081–1204),” in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, ed. W. Hörandner, A. Rhoby, and N. Zagklas (Leiden, 2019), 237–63.

15 Nikos Zagklas has suggested that Theodore Prodromos may have used some of his occasional poems in his teaching: see N. Zagklas, “Theodore Prodromos: The Neglected Poems and Epigrams” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2014), 75, 79–83. For a similar idea, see W. Hörandner, “Teaching with Verse in Byzantium,” in Hörandner et al., *Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, 459–86, at 463, 480.

16 Scholion ad *Carmina Iliaca*, p. 101, ed. P. L. M. Leone (Catania, 1995). On the *Carmina Iliaca* as erudite showpiece, see T. Braccini, “Erudita invenzione: Riflessioni sulla *Piccola grande Iliade* di Giovanni Tzetze,” *Incontri triestini di filologia classica* 9 (2009–2010): 153–73. On Tzetzes as poet in the *Carmina Iliaca*, see also F. Conca, “L’esegesi di Tzetzes ai *Carmina Iliaca*, fra tradizione e innovazione,” *KOINΩNIA* 42 (2018): 75–99, at 88–98.

17 On the *Carmina Iliaca* as a vehicle for teaching Homer, see M. Cardin, “Teaching Homer through (Annotated) Poetry: John Tzetzes’ *Carmina Iliaca*,” in *Brill’s Companion to Prequels, Sequels, and Retellings of Classical Epic*, ed. R. Simms (Leiden, 2018), 90–114. On the *Carmina Iliaca* and grammar teaching, see B. van den Berg, “Teaching Grammar with Poetry: Grammar Lessons in John Tzetzes’ Scholia on the *Carmina Iliaca*,” in *Byzantine Poetry in the “Long” Twelfth Century (1081–1204)*, ed. B. van den Berg and N. Zagklas (forthcoming).

18 Hörandner, “Teaching with Verse,” 481.

19 See, e.g., Jeffreys, “Why Produce Verse,” 227–28.

20 For the simplicity and clarity associated with the political verse, see, e.g., M. J. Jeffreys, “The Nature and Origins of the Political Verse,” *DOP* 28 (1974): 141–95, esp. 141–80.

21 E. Kneebone, “Τόσσ’ ἐδάην: The Poetics of Knowledge in Oppian’s *Halieutica*,” *Ramus* 37, nos. 1–2 (2008): 32–59, at 32.

22 For different answers to this question, see M. D. Lauxtermann, “Byzantine Didactic Poetry and the Question of Poeticity,” in Odorico et al., *Doux remède . . .*, 37–46, in response to I. Nilsson, “Narrating Images in Byzantine Literature: The Ekphraseis of Konstantinos Manasses,” *JÖB* 55 (2005): 121–46, at 130. On the poeticality of didactic poetry, see also Hörandner, “Teaching with Verse,” 478–81.

23 Manasses expresses didactic intentions in *Synopsis Chronike* 1–12 (O. Lampsidis, ed., *Constantini Manassis Breviarium Chronicum* [Athens, 1996]). On the literariness of the *Synopsis Chronike*, see, e.g., I. Nilsson, “Discovering Literariness in the Past: Literature vs. History in the *Synopsis Chronike* of Konstantinos Manasses,” in *L’écriture de la mémoire: La littérature de l’historiographie*, ed. P. Odorico, P. A. Agapitos, and M. Hinterberger (Paris, 2006), 15–31.

individual texts to a greater or lesser extent. Didactic poetry then becomes “a very specialized and more narrowly defined manifestation of the didactic mode.”²⁴

With Byzantine didactic poetry subject to a reevaluation in recent scholarship, studies have explored the characteristics of the genre as it was practiced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁵ The meter of choice is the political verse, with the dodecasyllable following in second place. Poets stress the pleasantness, playfulness, and ease of learning that comes with verse: the charm of verse makes light work of learning and presents potentially dull or technical material in an attractive form.²⁶ In addition, poets emphasize the synoptic nature of their work, contending that they aim at clarity and brevity. Most didactic poetry does not present original research but is a verse *metaphrasis* or summary of material available in prose. Didactic poems explicitly express an intention to teach and feature a teacher–student constellation, which is to say that there is a first-person narrator who takes on the role of a teacher addressing his student(s) in the second person, often with imperatives urging them to pay attention. In this way, a didactic poem presents itself as a lesson in progress.²⁷ If poets are writers of verses, as the scholia on Dionysius Thrax’s *Art of Grammar* state, and the grammarian is someone

who knows many poems,²⁸ then Tzetzes is a good starting point for exploring the interaction of poetry and (grammar) education in the twelfth century.

Tzetzes as Didactic Poet

Tzetzes was one of the most prolific authors of didactic poetry. His *Theogony*, written for the *sebastokratorissa* Eirene, catalogues the genealogy of gods and heroes in political verse;²⁹ the *Allegories of the Iliad* and *Allegories of the Odyssey* consist of an allegorical paraphrase of both Homeric epics in political verse, a project initially undertaken at the commission of the foreign-born Empress Eirene;³⁰ the interrelated works *On Differences between Poets*, *On Comedy*, and *On Tragedy* discuss the basics of ancient poetry and drama in twelve-syllable verses and iambic trimeters;³¹ the *Synopsis of Porphyry’s Isagoge* summarizes the work of the Neoplatonic philosopher in twelve-syllable verses;³² *On Rhetoric* presents a verse commentary on the Hermogenean corpus;³³ and *On Meters* contains a treatise on the nine most important ancient meters in

24 K. Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius* (New York, 2002), 42–43.

25 The following discussion draws on W. Hörandner, “The Byzantine Didactic Poem—A Neglected Literary Genre? A Survey with Special Reference to the Eleventh Century,” in *Poetry and Its Contexts in Eleventh-Century Byzantium*, ed. F. Bernard and K. Demoen (Farnham, 2012), 55–67, at 55–57; F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025–1081* (New York, 2014), 232–38; M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: Texts and Contexts*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 2003–2019), 2:199–202.

26 See also p. 286, above.

27 Hörandner, “Byzantine Didactic Poem,” 57; idem, “Teaching with Verse,” 460, drawing on the characteristics of ancient didactic poetry as defined by Volk, *Poetics of Latin Didactic*, 34–43. See also Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, 240–43. While Hörandner and Bernard follow Volk in referring to this phenomenon as “poetic simultaneity,” I have chosen to avoid this term as the ancient and medieval situations are different: while Volk’s poetic simultaneity refers to a fictional situation on the intratextual level only, the performative context of Byzantine didactic poetry means that there is not only an *impression* of a lesson in progress created *within* the text, but an actual lesson happening in the educational context, whether performed by the teacher or the student working on memorizing the verses.

28 See, e.g., scholia on Dionysius Thrax’s *Art of Grammar* 11.4–5, 16.5, 300.37–38 (on poets), 164.4 (on the grammarian), ed. A. Hilgard, *Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 1.3 (Leipzig, 1901).

29 Ed. I. Bekker, *Die Theogonie des Johannes Tzetzes aus der Bibliotheca Casanatensis herausgegeben* (Berlin, 1942); “Ioannis Tzetzae Theogonia,” in *Anecdota Graeca*, ed. P. Matrangola, 2 parts (Rome, 1850), 2:577–98. Maria Tomadaki is preparing a new edition. On Eirene, see, e.g., M. J. Jeffreys and E. M. Jeffreys, “Who Was Eirene the Sebastokratorissa?,” *Byzantion* 64, no. 1 (1994): 40–68.

30 *Allegories of the Iliad*, ed. Boissonade (n. 10); H. Hunger, ed., “Johannes Tzetzes, Allegorien zur Odyssee, Buch 13–24,” *BZ* 48, no. 1 (1955): 4–48; idem, ed., “Johannes Tzetzes, Allegorien zur Odyssee, Buch 1–12,” *BZ* 49, no. 2 (1956): 249–310. In English translation: A. J. Goldwyn and D. Kokkini, trans., *Allegories of the Iliad* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); idem, trans., *Allegories of the Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA, 2019).

31 Ed. W. J. W. Koster, *Prolegomena de comoedia: Scholia in Acharnenses, Equites, Nubes*, fasc. I.A: *Prolegomena de comoedia* (Groningen, 1969–1975). For *On Tragedy*: G. Pace, ed. and trans., *La poesia tragica* (Naples, 2007).

32 C. Harder, “Johannes Tzetzes’ Kommentar zu Porphyrios περί πέντε φωνῶν,” *BZ* 4, no. 2 (1895): 314–18. Nikos Zagklas is preparing a critical edition.

33 Ed. J. A. Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca e codd. manuscriptis bibliothecarum Oxoniensium*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1835–1837), 4:1–148; C. Walz, *Rhetores graeci*, 9 vols. in 10 (Stuttgart, 1832–1836), 3:670–86. Aglae Pizzone is preparing a new edition.

political verse.³⁴ The voluminous commentary on his own letters, commonly referred to as *Histories*, should also be added to this list, as well as numerous shorter scholia in verse.³⁵ Tzetzes' oeuvre is characterized by a common didactic rationale, which I explore in the following. I take a number of Tzetzes' less-studied works as my starting points as they can complement and deepen our understanding of Tzetzes' grammar teaching and his didactic oeuvre at large.

Didactic Intentions and the Didactic Journey

By combining a "typical" Byzantine didactic poem in political verse with a more ambitious literary proem in hexameters, the verse treatise *On Meters* demonstrates that the boundaries between literary ambition and didacticism are not always clear cut.³⁶ In the proem Tzetzes laments the death of his brother Isaac and dedicates the work to him. It opens with the work's objective:

ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΙΚΗΝ μαθέειν ποθέοντες, μέτρεα
πάντα,³⁷
τῇ δὲ βίβλῳ προσέχοντες, ἀρύεσθ' ὅσα κεκεύθει.
τὴν παρ' ἀδελφεῖς Τζέτζης θέτο, νέρτερα δῶρα.

34 Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca*, 3:302–32. The text needs a new critical edition. Tzetzes' brother Isaac also wrote a didactic treatise on meter in political verse: A. B. Drachmann, ed., *Isaac Tetzze De Metris Pindaricis commentarius* (Copenhagen, 1975).

35 Tzetzes' *Histories* are available in the edition by P. L. M. Leone (Galatina, 2007). Examples of scholia in verse can be found in, e.g., Tzetzes' scholia on his own *Carmina Iliaca*: see, e.g., 1.22c (twelve-syllable), 1.346–47 (political verse), ed. Leone. See also the twelve-syllable verses in *Commentary on Aristophanes' Wealth* ad 137, in *Scholia in Aristophanem*, fasc. 1: *Prolegomena et commentarius in Plutum*, ed. L. Massa Positano (Groningen 1960); *Commentary on Aristophanes' Frogs* ad 164b and 798a, and the "kanon" on ancient idiots in 990b, in *Scholia in Aristophanem*, fasc. 3: *Commentarium in Ranas et in Aves; Argumentum Equitum*, ed. W. J. W. Koster (Groningen, 1962). For Tzetzes' "kanon," see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 2:205.

36 On mixing meters, see N. Zagklas, "Metrical *Polyeideia* and Generic Innovation in the Twelfth Century: The Multimetrical Cycles of Occasional Poetry," in *Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: Texts and Contexts*, ed. A. Rhoby and N. Zagklas (Turnhout, 2018), 43–70.

37 Note the remarkably vulgar form μέτρεα (and elsewhere μετρέων). The form τὸ μέτρος (instead of τὸ μέτρον) is not uncommon in vernacular Greek. Its earliest occurrence may be the *Prochoprodromika*: see the critical apparatus at IV.72 in D.-C. Hesseling and H. Pernot, eds., *Poèmes prodromiques en grec vulgaire* (Amsterdam, 1910). I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this reference.

τὴν θέτο νέρτερα δῶρα Ἰωάννης Ἰσαακίω.³⁸
οἶτον ἀμειψαμένῳ παρὰ μοῖραν ἐξ ὀδυνάων.
ἃς ἔτλη Συρίῃ τε, Ῥόδῳ δ' ἐνὶ κάππεσε τύμβω.
κεῖνον ὀδυρόμενος τὸν δύσμορον οἶα περ ἔτλην.
βουλόμενος τε μέτροις παντοίοις τόνδε δακρύσαι,
τὴν βίβλον ἐξετέλεσσε τὰ μέτρεα πάντα προ-
φάσκων.³⁹

You who desire to learn grammar and all meters, pay attention to this book and draw in all it contains. Tzetzes has placed it at his brother's side, as a funerary gift: John gave it as a funerary gift to Isaac; before his time, he received doom in exchange for the pains he suffered in Syria; he ended up in a tomb in Rhodes. Mourning for the unfortunate one, for what he suffered, and wishing to cry for him in many different meters, John produced this book, explaining all meters.

The lament continues with examples of historical and mythological figures who honored their deceased loved ones with appropriate monuments: the Myrmidons mourned Patroclus and cut off their blond hair in his honor, then buried him in a golden tomb together with Achilles, for whom the nine Muses wept; a bronze maiden was positioned on the grave of King Midas; the Assyrians crowned the enormous tomb of their king Osimandus with a gold wreath; the Carians placed a high column on Mausolus's grave in the middle of the harbor of Halicarnassus; and the Macedonians, on Alexander's order, destroyed the battlements of surrounding cities when his beloved Hephaestion died.⁴⁰ Tzetzes, however, is unable to erect a monument for his brother, who died during his return from a

38 Note the two almost identical lines: one was probably intended to replace the other but is still there.

39 *On Meters* 302.7–15. All translations in this article are my own unless indicated otherwise.

40 *On Meters* 302.16–29. For the Myrmidons cutting their hair, see *Iliad* 23.135–36; for the Muses mourning Achilles, see *Odyssey* 24.60–64; for the golden urn uniting the bones of Patroclus and Achilles, see *Odyssey* 24.73–77; cf. *Iliad* 23.91–92, 243–48; for Midas, see *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* 324; for Osimandus's tomb, see Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 1.47–49; for the Mausoleum, see K. Brodersen, *Die sieben Weltwunder: Legendäre Kunst- und Bauwerke der Antike* (Munich, 1996), 78–83; for Hephaestion, see Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 72.2.

military expedition to Syria and was buried in Rhodes.⁴¹ Instead, so Tzetzes writes, Isaac is mourned by Hebe, the goddess of eternal youth, as well as by deities connected with literature, poetry, and learning: the Graces, the Muses, and *Logoi* personified.⁴² These deities represent the monument Tzetzes has fashioned in his brother's honor, which he claims will bring Isaac immortal fame: he refers, of course, to the treatise *On Meters*.⁴³

Tzetzes proceeds to the didactic part of the work by stressing once more his intentions:

ἀλλὰ γε καὶ μετρέων διῆξομαι αὐτὰ κέλευθα
σοῖο χάριν ποθέουσι περιφραδέως ἐρεείνων.
ὄφρα τεοῖς θρηνήμασιν ἐμμέτροισι τύχοντες,
ἰδμοσύνη προφέροιεν μετρέων ἐν διακρίσει·
κλήσιν δ' αὖ πρῶτιστα ποδῶν ἐξάρχομαι ἄδειν.⁴⁴

I will traverse the very paths of meters for your sake, speaking very thoughtfully for those who desire, in order that those who have read my metrical laments for you excel in knowing how to distinguish meters. I begin, then, first of all to sing the name of feet.

The image of a path or journey of learning, repeatedly found throughout *On Meters*, evokes the idea of the poem being a lesson in progress: by reading the poem we travel the path of meters and follow the learning process of the unnamed second-person addressee, with whom we can identify such that his educational journey becomes our own.⁴⁵ In a way, then, the didactic poem *is* the path and the journey.⁴⁶ Tzetzes signals

the progress of the poem with transitional phrases such as “I begin then”; these transitions are continuously found throughout *On Meters* and Tzetzes’ other didactic works in verse as well as prose.⁴⁷ They commonly announce that the topic in question has been discussed sufficiently and it is time to move on to the next point. Such phrases provide the text with a clear structure that guides the student through the material.⁴⁸ At the same time they point to a performative context and create a “recognizable structural composition” with clearly defined paratactic episodes, which make it easier to follow the lesson.⁴⁹ Tzetzes’ continuous use of verbs of speaking and listening for the acts of the teacher and student further suggests an oral performance in progress.⁵⁰ In the poem’s epilogue, moreover, Tzetzes concludes that he has brought his teaching about all meters to an end, a final transitional statement that once again adds to the impression of the poem coming

Graeco-Roman World, ed. C. Ferella and C. Breytenbach (Berlin, 2018), 217–40.

47 See, e.g., *On Meters* 305.16–17: “now that I have enumerated the simplest feet, I will next begin to speak also about the compound ones” (φέρει δ’ ἐπεὶ κατέλεξα πόδας τοὺς ἀπλουστάτους, / λέγειν λοιπὸν ἀρξώμεθα καὶ περὶ τῶν συνθέτων); 307.33–34: “but now that enough has been said about feet, I will next begin to speak about meters” (ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ περὶ ποδῶν ἀρκούντως νῦν ἐρρήθη, / φέρε λοιπὸν ἀρξώμεθα καὶ περὶ μέτρων λέγειν); 319.24–26: “I have said these things about the feet of verses, how far they advance and what their limit is; now I must teach about their endings” (καὶ ταῦτα μὲν εἰρήσθω μοι περὶ ποδῶν τῶν στίχων, / μέχρι περ οὐ προβαίνουσι, καὶ τί τὸ τούων τέρμα. / περὶ δὲ καταλήξεων νῦν τούτων διδασκτέον). See also, e.g., 308.10–11, 310.8–9, 316.2–6, 320.26–28, 322.2–6, 322.31–33. Examples from didactic poetry include *On Differences between Poets* 76–77, 141–44, ed. Koster; *On Tragedy* 46, 71–73, 87–93, ed. Pace. For prose, see, e.g., *Prolegomena on Comedy* 1.36, 66–68, 104–5; 2.46–47, 51–57, 76–77, ed. Koster.

48 On such structuring phrases, see also P. A. Agapitos, “Learning to Read and Write a *Schedos*: The Verse Dictionary of Paris. Gr. 400,” in “*Pour une poétique du Byzance*”: *Hommage à Vassilis Katsaros*, ed. P. Odorico, S. Efthymiadis, and I. D. Polemis (Paris, 2015), 11–24, esp. 22–23.

49 On such markers of performance in a different context, see P. A. Agapitos, “Mortuary Typology in the Lives of Saints: Michael the Synkellos and Stephen the Younger,” in *Les Vies des saints à Byzance: Genre littéraire ou biographie historique?*, ed. P. Odorico and P. A. Agapitos (Paris, 2004), 103–35, esp. 108–9; quotation from p. 105. For a different interpretation of such phrases in the context of ancient didactic poetry, see Volk, *Poetics of Latin Didactic*, 19, 40.

50 This is common in other didactic texts too: see, e.g., *On Tragedy* 1 (ἀκουε), 72 (ἀκροῶ), 88 (ἀκουε); *Prolegomena on Comedy* 1.118 (κριτικωτάταις ἀκροῦσθε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς).

41 On Isaac Tzetzes, see C. Wendel, “Tzetzes, 2. Isaac,” in *RE* 7A/2, cols. 2010–11. On Isaac’s death, see also John Tzetzes’ *Letters* 10 and 13 as discussed in Pizzone, “*Historiai* of John Tzetzes,” 189–90, 199.

42 *On Meters* 303.15–19.

43 *On Meters* 303.25–27.

44 *On Meters* 304.1–5.

45 In some didactic works, as in *On Meters*, the second-person addressee is singular, whereas elsewhere (e.g., in the *Prolegomena on Comedy*) the second-person plural is used. Sometimes the addressee is a young person: see, e.g., *On Differences between Poets* 5 (νέε), 93, 134, 141, 151, 168 (τέκνον), ed. Koster.

46 On travel metaphors for the poetic process, see Volk, *Poetics of Latin Didactic*, 20–23. On the relation of traveling and learning in works on Homer by Tzetzes and Eustathios, see V. F. Lovato, “The Wanderer, the Philosopher, and the Exegete: Receptions of the *Odyssey* in Twelfth-Century Byzantium,” in *Paths of Knowledge: Interconnection(s) between Knowledge and Journey in the*

into being while we are reading it. He urges his addressees to carry on the memory of the Tzetzes brothers with his metrical teaching still ringing in their ears, “after learning everything accurately with ears and mind” (οὔασι καὶ πραπίδεσσι καὶ ἀτρεκέως δεδαώτες).⁵¹

After the proem in hexameter, Tzetzes switches to political verse and starts his discussion of the nine most important ancient meters by listing the names of the different types of metrical feet. After discussing two-, three-, four-, five-, and six-syllable feet (304.11–307.34), Tzetzes explains the nine meters, consecutively addressing the iambic meter (308.12–310.9), the trochaic meter (310.10–311.16), the anapestic meter (311.17–21), the choriambic meter (311.22–312.3), the antispastic meter (312.4–313.15), the Ionic *a maiore* (313.16–28), the Ionic *a minore* (313.29–314.10), the Paemonic meter (314.11–22), and, finally, the heroic meter (314.23–315.11), with its subdivision into Aeolic (315.13–19) and logaoedic (315.20–316.6).⁵² The next part of the treatise evaluates various definitions of *kōla* and other verse components (316.7–319.25), verse endings (319.26–320.26), and *epiplokai* or combinations of meters (320.27–322.2), before returning to Tzetzes’ own definitions of syllables and verse components (322.3–326.19). After a discussion of metrical units (326.20–330.16), compound and *asynarteta*, or “unconnected,” meters (330.16–331.8), and summarizing and concluding remarks (331.9–332.31), the treatise closes with the epilogue in hexameter mentioned above (333.4–10).

Students learned the rules of ancient meter as part of their grammar education. Even if this was theoretical knowledge to some extent, there certainly was a practical side to learning techniques of versification: students were supposed to compose poetry as part of their training.⁵³ A twelfth-century father by the name of Christopher Zonaras, for instance, urges his son to take his studies seriously and persevere in his attempts to compose verse as well as prose, as practice makes perfect.⁵⁴ Tzetzes’ *On Meters* displays a similar focus

on versification: toward the end of the work Tzetzes claims that he has included all that metricians need to know for writing verse,⁵⁵ and his formulation throughout the work also suggests that his lessons have a productive purpose. Regarding the choriambic meter, for instance, he instructs his student, “If you wish to write this meter in its pure form, use the choriambic foot and the tribrachiam, and along with them the diiamb, and these three only. And do not use the tribrachiam often.”⁵⁶ Other lessons are formulated in an equally prescriptive way, thus guiding the student toward correct versification.

The Teacherly Manner: Accuracy, Clarity, Brevity

Throughout his didactic oeuvre—in *On Meters* as much as other texts in verse and prose—Tzetzes repeatedly stresses the accuracy and clarity of his own explanations.⁵⁷ Another crucial feature of his work that receives repeated emphasis is its conciseness. We encounter Tzetzes’ focus on brevity, for instance, in *On Meters* 332.28–29 (quoted in n. 55), where he claims that he has briefly presented everything one needs to know without compromising the thoroughness of the account. Many similar passages could be listed where Tzetzes underlines his self-professed “fondness of brevity.”⁵⁸ Tzetzes’ didactic rationale thus shares with Byzantine didactic texts more generally an emphasis on accuracy (ἀκρίβεια), brevity (συντομία), and clarity (σαφήνεια). These qualities are essential to what Tzetzes considers the excellence of his work and to the rhetoric he uses to advertise his services as grammarian.

Λόγος παραινετικός εἰς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ Δημήτριον, 2. Ἐπιστολὴς,” *Epistemonike Epeterida tes Philosophikes Scholes* 21 (1981): 391–400.

55 *On Meters* 332.28–29: “I have written all that metricians need to know for verse writing; I have presented it to you compactly, but extensively” (ὅσον δ’ ἐχρῆν τοῖς μετρικοῖς γινώσκειν στιχουργαῖς, / ἔγραψα, παρεθέμην σοι στενῶς, πεπλατυσμένως).

56 *On Meters* 311.29–32: ἀλλ’ εἴπερ βούλει καθαρὸν γράφειν τὸ μέτρον τόδε / τῷ χοριάμβῳ τῷ ποδὶ, καὶ τῷ τριβραχιάμβῳ, / καὶ διιάμβῳ σὺν αὐτοῖς χρώ, τοῖς τρισὶ καὶ μόνοις· / καὶ τῷ τριβραχιάμβῳ δὲ μὴ κατα-χρῶ πολλάκις.

57 See, e.g., *On Meters* 317.1–4 and *On Tragedy* 146–53, ed. Pace, as quoted below.

58 Scholion ad *Carmina Iliaca*, p. 101, ed. Leone: “The present poet, being fond of brevity and caring about the benefit of the youth, has synoptically set forth the entire *Iliad* in the present book” (Ὁ παρὼν ποιητής, φιλοσύντομος ὢν καὶ τῆς ὠφελείας τῶν νέων φροντίζων, συνοπτικῶς τὴν πᾶσαν Ἰλιάδα ἐν τῇ παρούσῃ βιβλῷ ἐξέθετο).

51 The epilogue (written in hexameter) is found in *On Meters* 333.4–10, quotation from 333.8.

52 Hephaestion treats the meters in almost the same order, with the only difference that he discusses the hexameter between the trochaic and anapestic. On Hephaestion’s *Encheiridion*, see below.

53 See, e.g., Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, 216–22.

54 See, e.g., Christopher Zonaras, *Adhortatory Address to His Son* 394.91–99, 398.221–23, ed. E. Th. Tsolakakis, “Χριστοφόρου Ζωναρά, 1.

Clarity and brevity are counted among the virtues of narrative in the late antique handbooks of *progymnasmata*,⁵⁹ while Hermogenes defines clarity as one of the main types of styles in his influential taxonomy of rhetorical styles. Tzetzes, too, repeatedly refers to them as virtues of rhetorical discourse, not least of his own.⁶⁰ In the scholia on the *Carmina Iliaca*, for instance, he points out features of the poem that enhance its clarity, such as his decision to start with a brief introduction to the subject matter of the poem before embarking upon the “very rhetorical narration” proper.⁶¹ In a similar vein, Eustathios praises both Homer and the late emperor Manuel I Komnenos for the remarkable clarity of their oratory.⁶² Homer, moreover, exemplifies the rhetorical technique of alternating brevity and lengthiness, thus creating the variation advisable in rhetorical discourse.⁶³

While clarity and brevity may thus not be devoid of rhetorical and aesthetic connotations, for Tzetzes they are closely linked with being a good teacher. We find a statement of the *didaskalikos tropos* (“teacherly manner”) in a scholion on the Pleiades, where he summarizes what drives his didactic discourse:⁶⁴

ἀρχαγγελικὰς δὲ δυνάμεις ὅστις ἰμείροιτο τὰς
Πλειάδας μανθάνειν, ὥς καὶ τὰς Μούσας,
προσεχέτω τῷ Πρόκλῳ. οὐδὲν γὰρ ἡμεῖς τοιοῦτο
λαβρὸν οὐδὲ σοφὸν ἐπιστάμεθα, ἀλλὰ σαφές
τε καὶ σύντομον καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐχόμενον,
εἰ μή που ἢ ψευδῇ τινὰ ἱστορίαν ἐλέγχοιμεν ἢ

59 For the virtues of narrative, see, e.g., Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 2.4, in *Corpus Rhetoricum*, ed. M. Patillon, 5 vols. (Paris, 2008–<2014>), 1:49–162, with a more elaborate discussion of clarity (20.7–14) and brevity (21.15–23.4) in the commentary by John of Sardis, *Commentarium in Aphthonii progymnasmata*, ed. H. Rabe (Leipzig, 1928).

60 Tzetzes discusses the “virtues of discourse” in, e.g., *Histories* 11, 369.137–57; 12, 428.561–84, ed. Leone; *Prolegomena on Comedy* 1.61–65, ed. Koster.

61 Scholion on *Carmina Iliaca* 1.20a, ed. Leone.

62 See B. van den Berg, “Homer and the Good Ruler in the ‘Age of Rhetoric’: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Excellent Oratory,” in *Homer and the Good Ruler in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. J. Klooster and B. van den Berg (Leiden, 2018), 219–38, at 232–35.

63 See van den Berg, “Homer and Rhetoric in Byzantium,” 118–20.

64 The quotation is part of Tzetzean material found in one of the main manuscripts with Aratus’s *Phaenomena* and *scholia vetera*: see J. Martin, ed., *Scholia in Aratum vetera* (Stuttgart, 1974), xxviii, with the Tzetzean excerpt on pp. 547–51.

διορθοίημεν, ἢ τι μυθῶδες ἀλληγοροίημεν, ἢ ἀτέχνως γεγραμμένον τεχνικῶς διαγράφοιμεν, οὐ μεταρσίους λόγων συνθήκαις, οὐ κόμπῳ ῥημάτων, ἀλλὰ σαφεῖ καὶ περιπεζίῳ τῇ λέξει, ὡς ὁ διδασκαλικὸς τρόπος παρακελεύεται.

Whoever desires to learn about the Pleiades, as well as the Muses, as archangelic forces, should turn to Proclus. For I do not know anything so mighty and wise, but [I know] what is clear, concise, and truthful, unless I refute or correct a false story, or allegorize something mythical, or describe in a skillful manner what was written without skill, not with highfalutin compositions of sentences, not with pompous words, but with a clear and simple diction, as the teacherly manner requires.

The teacherly manner that Tzetzes formulates here applies to both prose and verse.⁶⁵ Unlike Proclus, he does not give lofty philosophical explanations but focuses on clarity, conciseness, and truthfulness.⁶⁶ By repeatedly stressing these key aspects, Tzetzes displays a didactic consciousness that can be contrasted with the poetic self-consciousness of ancient didactic poetry: while the latter draws attention to its being poetry, Tzetzes foregrounds the didactic qualities of his work.⁶⁷ These qualities, however, are also essential to discourse that is not directly didactic: Tzetzes is not only a good teacher but also a good poet. Indeed, for Tzetzes, the two were inseparable, not just in terms of aesthetics, but also in very practical economic terms: good poetry and good pedagogy were central to getting commissions from the patrons who could fund a writer’s life.

65 On mixing learned elements and vernacular language as another element of the “teacherly style” of twelfth-century authors, see P. A. Agapitos, “New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The *Schedourgia* of Theodore Prodromos,” *Medioevo Greco* 15 (2015): 1–41, at 33, 41.

66 For Proclus on the Pleiades, see scholia on Hesiod’s *Works and Days* 331, pp. 240.27–242.3, in *Poetae minores graeci*, ed. T. Gaisford, vol. 2: *Scholia ad Hesiodum* (Leipzig, 1823). For Proclus on the Muses, see, e.g., *Hymn to the Muses*, in R. M. van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden, 2001), 208–23, with further refs.

67 On poetic self-consciousness in ancient didactic poetry, see Volk, *Poetics of Latin Didactic*, 6–22, 39.

Tzetzes' statement of his *didaskalikos tropos* is closely related to his conception of *oikonomia*, which concerns the responsibility of the good writer to adjust his language and disposition to the purpose of his work and the educational level of his audience.⁶⁸ Tzetzes' choice for a "clear and intelligible style" rather than pompous words and "highfalutin compositions of sentences" does not mean that he is technically unable to write in a more elevated way. Rather, his teacherly manner involves a simpler and more straightforward register. In his verse commentary on Pseudo-Hermogenes' *On Invention*, Tzetzes blends poetic and didactic self-consciousness by invoking the simple (περιπεζία) Muse at the outset, "swollen neither with words nor with the pomp of phrases" (μή λέξεσι φλεγμαίνουσα μηδὲ ῥημάτων κόμπῳ). He urges this Muse "to articulate this book *On Invention* in an intelligible and clear discourse and in teacherly manner" (καὶ τὸ περὶ εὐρέσεων βιβλίον διατράνου / εὐλήπτῳ λόγῳ καὶ σαφεῖ καὶ διδασκάλου τρόπῳ).⁶⁹ Tzetzes reminds the Muse that she is addressing students who are still in need of learning, which requires an accessible and transparent discussion on the part of the teacher. Knowing the rules of the *techne*, Tzetzes' Muse needs to realize that this is not the right place to indulge in more ambitious and pompous forms of discourse. To do so would mean to prove oneself unskilled (ἄτεχνος).⁷⁰ In other words, choosing simple discourse in this didactic context is the hallmark of true skill; using (seemingly) elevated and sophisticated language for the wrong audience is a major pedagogic and technical fault.

In similar contexts in his didactic verse and prose exegesis, Tzetzes repeatedly refers to his work as "instantaneous" (αὐθωρός) and "unstudied" (ἄμελέτητος). This applies equally to verse treatises with an aristocratic dedicatee, such as the *Theogony*, dedicated to the *sebastokratorissa* Eirene,⁷¹ and to prose works that do

not mention a noble patron. In the prolegomena to his *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days*, for instance, Tzetzes rather apologetically entreats his readers to be kind in their judgment of his exegesis, especially in comparison with Proclus's. His work is improvised (αὐτοσχέδιος) and not equipped with "silver-plated wings of words" (περιηργυρωμένας τῶν λέξεων πτέρυγας).⁷² Read against Tzetzes' ideas on *oikonomia* and the *didaskalikos tropos*, this statement becomes less apologetic than it seems at first sight. Tzetzes' teacherly manner does not require polished rhetorical discourse. In fact, this would even hamper the good teacher in getting his message across. Keeping things simple when circumstances demand it is what requires true skill.

Predecessors and Polemics

Tzetzes' didactic poems largely draw on earlier scholarship. *On Meters*, for instance, follows to a large extent the *Encheiridion*, or *Little Handbook*, by Hephaestion of Alexandria (second century CE) and later scholia on the work (e.g., by the eighth-/ninth-century grammarian George Choiboskos).⁷³ The *Encheiridion* had become the most influential treatise on ancient meter in Byzantium, its epitomic style attracting a large body of exegetical scholarship.⁷⁴ It was never Tzetzes' intention to present original research; rather, he—and his brother—aimed to make the potentially difficult learning of meter easy:

P. Marciniak (forthcoming). On Tzetzes as poet on commission, see M. Grünbart, "Byzantinisches Gelehrtenelend—oder wie meist tert man seinen Alltag?," in *Zwischen Polis, Provinz und Peripherie: Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. L. M. Hoffmann and A. Monchizadeh (Mainz, 2005), 413–26; A. Rhoby, "Ioannes Tzetzes als Auftragsdichter," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 15, no. 2 (2010): 155–70.

72 *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days*, 11.21–12.4, ed. Gaisford, quotation from 12.1–2. In the same prolegomena (12.13–15), Tzetzes refers to his *On Differences between Poets* as "improvised iambs" (αὐτοσχέδιοις ἰάμβοις).

73 J. M. van Ophuijsen, *Hephaestion on Metre: A Translation and Commentary* (Leiden, 1987). See also E. Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship: A Guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises, from Their Beginnings to the Byzantine Period* (New York, 2006), 80–81 (on Choiboskos), 104–5 (on Hephaestion).

74 On Hephaestion's *Encheiridion* and metrical treatises in Byzantium, see H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1978), 2:51–53.

68 For Tzetzes' ideas on *oikonomia*, see Agapitos, "John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners," 50–55, with a discussion of the epilogue of the *Theogony*.

69 *On Rhetoric* 684.4–7, ed. Walz.

70 *On Rhetoric* 684.8–17, ed. Walz.

71 On the *Theogony*, see Agapitos, "John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners," 37. Despite its (allegedly) improvised nature, the *Theogony* draws from many different sources: see M. Tomadaki, "Uncovering the Literary Sources of John Tzetzes' *Theogony*," in *Preserving, Commenting, Adapting: Byzantine Commentaries on Ancient Texts, 12th–15th Centuries*, ed. B. van den Berg, D. Manolova, and

κἄν γὰρ ἀπάντης καὶ μακρὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ τρίβος,
 κἄν περ κοπῶδης καὶ σκληρὰ τυγχάνῃ κατὰ φύσιν,
 ἀλλ' οὐν ἐπιτεχνήσεσι καὶ πόνοις τῶν Τζετζίων,
 ὁδοιποιοῦντων τὰ δεινὰ τῆς δυσβατοτροπίας,
 πανευμαρῆς τις γίνεταί καὶ κατημαξευμένη.⁷⁵

Even if the path of virtue is steep and long, and even if it is wearisome and rough by nature, it becomes very easy and simple through the inventions and efforts of the Tzetzes brothers, who make passable the dangers of its impassability.

Even though technical and moral virtue are often closely related in Tzetzes' view, as we will see below (pp. 299–301), here virtue refers to technical virtue, i.e., knowing the rules of meter and being able to compose correct verses. Echoes of a gnomic discussion on vice and virtue in Hesiod's moralizing *Works and Days* (vv. 286–92) enhance the connection of metrical skill with moral virtue.

Hesiod addresses his didactic poem to his brother Perses, who squandered not only his own share of their inherited fortune but also Hesiod's.⁷⁶ The Hesiodic narrator urges him to better his life in a poem with instructions in agriculture and moral lessons on the virtue of hard and honest work. In the prolegomena to his *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days*, Tzetzes summarizes the didactic intention of the work as “ethical and economical advice of various kinds, an exhortation to work, and instruction in farming as well as on the right moments to perform the tasks.”⁷⁷ *Works and Days* contains many gnomic statements such as that on vice and virtue alluded to in the above passage from *On Meters*. It explains how easy it is to fall into vice quickly and to an excessive degree as it dwells nearby and the path leading to its dwelling is even. The path to virtue, however, is “long and steep, and rough at first—yet when one arrives at the top, then it becomes easy, difficult though it still is.”⁷⁸ One can only reach virtue's

dwelling through sweat (*Works and Days* 289) or, as Tzetzes explains in his commentary, through labor and time (πόνος and χρόνος).⁷⁹ In Tzetzes' text, then, the road to technical virtue qua thorough knowledge of the meters is steep and long, yet easy and accessible with the didactic guidance of the Tzetzes brothers.

In other didactic works, Tzetzes also defines the main purpose of his efforts as making the matters at hand accessible. In the prolegomena to *Allegories of the Iliad*, for instance, he states that Empress Eirene commissioned him to make the great and deep Ocean of Homer traversable, which is exactly what the work intends to do: Tzetzes' words are like the staff of Moses, opening up Homeric poetry for everyone and revealing its invisible depths.⁸⁰ In the same prolegomena he claims to have compiled into one work the knowledge of more than one hundred books, so that his readers have at their disposal whole libraries with minimal effort.⁸¹ Eustathios similarly argues in the proem of his *Commentary on the Iliad* that he deserves gratitude for collecting material from many different sources and presenting it in one work for the convenience of his reader.⁸² Such recurring statements suggest that

Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, trans. G. W. Most (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

⁷⁹ *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* ad 286, ed. Gaisford. In this scholion, Tzetzes refers to the *Posthomeric* by Quintus of Smyrna, whose famous gnomic description of Mount Arete depicted on the shield of Achilles draws inspiration from Hesiod. On Quintus's Mount Arete, see, e.g., C. A. Maciver, “Returning to the Mountain of Arete: Reading Ecphrasis, Constructing Ethics in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomeric*,” in *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic*, ed. M. Baumbach and S. Bär (Berlin, 2007), 259–84. For further Hesiodic echoes, see pp. 299–300, below.

⁸⁰ *Allegories of the Iliad*, prolegomena 28–34, ed. Boissonade. On Tzetzes' allegorical method, which aims to reveal the true meaning and universal lessons behind Homer's mythical stories, see Cesaretti, *Allegoristi di Omero*, 125–204; A. Goldwyn, “Theory and Method in John Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Iliad and Allegories of the Odyssey*,” *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3 (2017): 141–71.

⁸¹ *Allegories of the Iliad*, prolegomena 480–87, ed. Boissonade. On Tzetzes as a reader of many books, see also p. 296, below.

⁸² Eustathios, *Commentary on the Iliad* 3.34–41 = 4.34–5.8, ed. van der Valk. For a discussion of this passage, see van den Berg, “Wise Poet and His Erudite Commentator,” 40–42. Photius formulates a similar idea in his discussion of Stobaeus's florilegium of Greek authors: see *Bibliotheca* 167, 115b, ed. R. Henry, 9 vols. (Paris, 1959–1991), 2:159, discussed in I. Nilsson and E. Nyström, “To

⁷⁵ *On Meters* 305.32–306.4.

⁷⁶ On Perses' terrible economics, see *Works and Days* 34–41.

⁷⁷ *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* 21.15–18, ed. Gaisford: παραίνεσιν καὶ ἠθικὴν καὶ οἰκονομικὴν περιέχον παντοίαν, καὶ προτροπὴν πρὸς τὰ ἔργα, καὶ γεωργίας διδασκαλίαν, προσέτι δὲ καὶ καιρῶν, οἷς δεῖ τὰς ἐργασίας ποιέεσθαι.

⁷⁸ *Works and Days* 290–92, ed. M. L. West (Oxford, 1978): μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτὴν / καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὶ δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται, / ῥηιδίῃ δὴ πειτα πέλει, χαλεπὴ περ ἐοῦσα. Translation from

Byzantine scholars did not regard derivativeness outright negatively, but considered conveniently presenting material from earlier—and perhaps not readily accessible—sources an accomplishment to be appreciated.

Tzetzes displays a critical attitude toward his sources; even authorities as respected as Hermogenes and Hephaestion (or even Homer) are not safe from criticism.⁸³ When discussing the different constituents of verses, for instance, Tzetzes rejects Hermogenes' definitions of shorter units ("You must know that he [sc. Hermogenes] is wrong about *kommata* and *kōla*") although he does approve of his analysis of longer clauses ("He speaks very well about the extended clause and the *pneuma*. Besides, I also like the term 'period.'").⁸⁴ After briefly discussing Hephaestion's definition of *komma* and *kōlon*, Tzetzes concludes with a straightforward assertion of his own expertise:

ταῦτα μὲν οὗτοι φάσκουσι, σὺ δὲ καλῶς μοι
πρόσχες,
καὶ μάθης ἅπαν ἀκριβῶς ἄγαν καὶ σαφεστάτως,
ὅσον ἀρμόζει μετρικοῖς πᾶσι καὶ στιχογράφοις·
τὸν Τζέτζην σχῶν διδάσκαλον, οὐχὶ τοὺς λε-
λεγμένους.⁸⁵

They [sc. Hermogenes and Hephaestion] say these things, but you must pay close attention to me and learn everything metricians and verse writers should know in a very accurate and clear manner, with Tzetzes as your teacher, not the ones I just mentioned.

Tzetzes' critical attitude frequently turns outright polemical. In *On Meters* Tzetzes fulminates, for instance, against those who call verse endings *apotheseis*, as, for instance, Hephaestion does, but, interestingly, also

Tzetzes' brother Isaac in his verse treatise *On Pindaric Meters*.⁸⁶ Only "pretentious metricians" (ἀλαζόνες μετρικοί) use this term "in order to seem all-wise while foolishly using novel words, in order to seem Atticists while being barbarous Thracians."⁸⁷ As in many other places, Tzetzes here accuses his predecessors of talking nonsense or using the wrong terms.⁸⁸ He urges his readers to turn to him instead: unlike his pretentious colleagues, he will teach everything in simple terms.⁸⁹ Elsewhere Tzetzes accuses his predecessors of presenting a confused account of the matter at hand—in their ignorance, they falsely claim that the antispastic meter contains both anapestic and choraic feet, for instance. Yet they are wrong and confuse things: the antispastic meter can contain all feet in every position.⁹⁰

Tzetzes' other didactic poems contain many similar accusations. I cite one telling example from *On Tragedy*, where Tzetzes concludes his discussion of previous scholarship on the parts of a tragic play as follows:

οὕτω μὲν οὗτοι φασὶ συμπεφυρμένως.
ὅταν ὁ Εὐκλείδης τε καὶ Κράτης γράφων
ἄλλοι τε πολλοὶ τῶν λόγοις διηρμένων,
ἄνθρωπε, κἂν κράξωσι τοῖς στρόφοις λόγων
τὰ σκηνικὰ γράφοντες ἐμπεφυρμένως,
μάθης δὲ μηδὲν ἐξ ἐκείνων ὧν θέλεις,
Τζέτζη προσελθὼν ἀκριβῶς ἅπαν μάθε
λόγῳ διαυγεί καὶ σαφεῖ καὶ συντόμῳ.⁹¹

86 See, e.g., Hephaestion, *Encheiridion*, ch. 4 (Περὶ ἀποθέσεως μέτρων), ed. M. Consbruch (Stuttgart, 1971 [1906]); Isaac Tzetzes, *On Pindaric Meters* 23.11, 25.17, 87.16–17, ed. Drachmann. On Isaac and Hephaestion, see F. Budelmann, "Metrical Scholia on Pindar," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 43 (1999): 195–201, at 197–99.

87 *On Meters* 319.26–30; quotation from 28–29: ὡς ἂν δοκοῖεν πάνσοφοι, λέξεις καινὰς ληροῦντες / ὡς ἂν δοκοῖεν Ἀττικοί, βάρβαροι Θράκες ὄντες. On Tzetzes' derision of scholars and grammarians as barbarians, see pp. 297–99, below.

88 See, e.g., *On Meters* 307.31–32; *Prolegomena on Comedy*, 2.70–71.

89 *On Meters* 319.30.

90 *On Meters* 312.23–26. Cf. George Choïroboskos, *Commentary on Hephaestion*, 238.11–22, *Hephaestion's Enchiridion*, ed. Consbruch. Hephaestion's discussion of the antispastic meter has been the subject of debate in modern scholarship: see van Ophuijsen, *Hephaestion on Metre*, 99 with further refs.

91 *On Tragedy* 146–53, ed. Pace (with commentary on pp. 123–25). See also *On Tragedy* 88–93, ed. Pace (the confused accounts of Euclides and others), and *Prolegomena on Comedy* 2.51–57, ed. Koster (Dionysius, Euclides, and Crates have discussed matters in a confused manner).

Compose, Read, and Use a Byzantine Text: Aspects of the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses," *BMGS* 33, no. 1 (2009): 42–60, at 52.

83 On criticism of predecessors (including Homer) in Tzetzes' scholia on the *Carmina Iliaca*, see Conca, "L'esegesi di Tzetzes," 78–84. Hermogenes is also repeatedly criticized in *On Rhetoric* (see, e.g., 112.11–19 and 117.6, ed. Cramer). Other predecessors who suffer criticism are, for instance, Proclus (*Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* 13–21, ed. Gaisford) and John Doxapatres (*On Rhetoric* 112.11–19, 115.30).

84 *On Meters* 316.23–25: ἀλλ' ἴσθι τοῦτον ψεύδεσθαι τοῖς κόμμασι καὶ κώλοις. / τὸ δὲ σχοινοτενές φησι κάλλιστα καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα. / ἄρ᾽ ἐσκεῖ δέ μοι σὺν αὐτοῖς καὶ κλήσις περιόδου.

85 *On Meters* 317.1–4.

Thus they speak in confusion. Whenever Eucleides and Crates and many other writers who are distinguished in learning, my fellow, shout with their twisted words, writing about theatrical matters in a confused way, and you learn nothing of the things you wish to learn, come to Tzetzes and learn everything accurately in a transparent, clear, and concise manner.

The predecessors Tzetzes mentions here have not been identified and it has been suggested that they are fictitious, their names the generic names of ancient grammarians.⁹² If so, it supports the idea that Tzetzes uses criticism of his predecessors—whether real or invented—as a rhetorical strategy to underline his own expertise and shape his own teaching persona. In other words, such critical remarks demonstrate, indirectly, what Tzetzes defines as ideal for grammarians and their scholarship. Indeed, in *On Meters* he explicitly states that *he* will never confound the ears of his listeners or create confusion.⁹³

Good Grammarians vs. Schedographers: *Hellenismos* vs. *Barbarismos*

Tzetzes' ideas of good grammar teaching show themselves in his criticism not only of predecessors but also of rival grammarians of his own time. His polemical remarks often involve the incorrect use of prosody, a frequent topic throughout his didactic and exegetical works. Grammatical treatises divide prosody into accentuation, breathing, syllable length, and other diacritic signs, a thorough knowledge of which is essential for reading and pronouncing words correctly.⁹⁴ Knowing the rules of prosody is thus essential for versifiers as well as prose writers, a point Tzetzes is eager to stress in the examples below.⁹⁵ He is especially attentive to syllable length and, in particular, the usage of dichronic vowels, i.e., vowels that can be either long

or short. No “fairly trivial metrical issue” for Tzetzes,⁹⁶ who repeatedly discusses, for instance, the dichronic vowels in the scholia on the *Carmina Iliaca*.⁹⁷

In a long scholion, Tzetzes urges those who wish to learn everything correctly to turn to him (as we heard elsewhere too) and ignore the criticisms others have leveled at him for not understanding the usage of dichronic vowels.⁹⁸ He continues as follows:

οὐδείς γὰρ οὐδέποτε ὡς ἡμεῖς μετρικὴν τέχνην καὶ ποιητικὴν ἠκριβώσατο. ἔτι δὲ οὐδὲ τῶν κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίαν τελούντων ἡμῖν τις πολυπληθεστέρας ἀνέγνωκε βίβλους, πλὴν μέντοι τῶν θειοτέρων· καὶ εἰ φανητιᾶν ἦν ὀρεκτόν μοι καὶ ἐπιδείκνυσθαι, πυρίκαυστα ἂν ἐγεγόνει τὰ τῶν νῦν στιχουργήματα ἐν ταῖς ποιησάντων αὐτὰ κεφαλαῖς, τὰ μὲν ὡς μετρικῆς τέχνης νενοθευμένα καὶ ἀλλοπρόσαλλα καὶ δεδεγμένα ὡς ἔτυχε, μὴ ὑπ' οὐδενὸς κανόνος τῶν μετρικῶν βοηθούμενα, οἷα καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν ὀλίγοις ἀκολουθοῦντες θολοῦμεν τὴν τέχνην, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἂν οὕτως ἐπυρακτώσαμεν, ἵνα κατὰ μὴδὲν συνέβαινε τὴν τέχνην θολοῦσθαι, τὰ δὲ ὡς παντελῶς τρόπων ποιητικῶν ἀποδεόντα.⁹⁹

For no one has ever discussed the arts of meter and poetry as accurately as I have. What is more, no one living in this time and age has read more books than I have, with the exception of the more divine books, however.¹⁰⁰ And if I had a desire to be ostentatious and show off, the versifications of today's versemongers would have gone up in flames inside the heads of those who composed them, some because their meter is false, inconsistent, and random, not supported by any rule of the metricians, just as I too muddled up

92 See Koster, *Prolegomena de comoedia*, xxii–xxix, and Pace, *La poesia tragica*, 13–17.

93 *On Meters* 332.21–22.

94 See, e.g., scholia on Dionysius Thrax's *Art of Grammar* 13.15–6, 16.12–13, 454.8–9, 567.17–20, ed. Hilgard.

95 On prosody and prose in modern scholarship, see, e.g., W. Hörandner, *Der Prosarhythmus in der rhetorischen Literatur der Byzantiner* (Vienna, 1981); V. Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm in Byzantium: The Sound of Persuasion* (New York, 2013).

96 Jeffreys, “Nature and Origins,” 150.

97 On lessons in prosody in Tzetzes' scholia on the *Carmina Iliaca*, see also van den Berg, “Teaching Grammar with Poetry.” On *dichrona* in Byzantine prosody, see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 2:269, 273–76; for Tzetzes in particular, see also M. D. Lauxtermann, “Buffaloes and Bastards: Tzetzes on Metre” (forthcoming).

98 Scholion on *Carmina Iliaca* 1.12.4a, p. 128.17–21, ed. Leone.

99 Scholion on *Carmina Iliaca* 1.12.4a, p. 129.23–130.11, ed. Leone.

100 Tzetzes' boast of having read more books than anyone else is frequent throughout his oeuvre. See Pizzzone, “*Historiai* of John Tzetzes,” 197–200 for Tzetzes' claim of being like a living library. Cf. *Allegories of the Iliad*, prolegomena 480–87, as discussed on p. 294, above.

the art [of meter] in some of my works after their example; I would then set these on fire in this way, to prevent the art [of meter] from being muddled up in any respect; others because they lack any poetic character altogether.

Here Tzetzes disparages the verses of his contemporaries for generally lacking poetic quality as well as breaking the rules of meter, which not only means that the versifiers in question are bad poets but also that they are bad *τεχνικοί* or *γραμματικοί* (“grammarians”). His admission that he himself used to make mistakes is found elsewhere too. In the *Histories*, for instance, he cites some of the iambs he composed in his youth, commenting that he still misused dichronic vowels in these verses, just like buffaloes do.¹⁰¹ The term “buffalo” and other animal imagery belong to a set of recurring motifs with which Tzetzes attacks his peer group, schedographers in particular.¹⁰² In the *Histories* Tzetzes accuses schedographers of having utterly barbarized the art of letters: they treat ancient sources with disrespect, cannot be bothered to read any books, and hate the rules of grammar, including those concerning dichronic vowels.¹⁰³ Their ignorance is the result of deliberate carelessness and negligence of everything that makes a good grammarian.

In a long digression in the *Commentary on Aristophanes' Wealth*—intended to fill the page where Aristophanes' text gave no reason for lengthy explanations¹⁰⁴—Tzetzes similarly castigates unnamed others

for ignoring the importance of dichronic vowels and, perhaps even worse, ridiculing him.¹⁰⁵

σολοικισμός ἐστὶ τὸ περὶ τὴν σύνταξιν τὴν λογικὴν ἀμαρτάνειν, βαρβαρισμός δὲ τὸ περὶ χρόνους, τόνους καὶ πνεύματα· πῶς οὖν ἐθέλοιτε καλεῖσθαι μὴ βάρβαροι περὶ ταῦτα πάντα ἐξαμαρτάνοντες, λάθρα δὲ καὶ παραβύστω σὺν ὁμοτρόποις ὑμῖν ἡμᾶς διασύροντες, τοῖς ἀμαθέσι λόγων καὶ λάροις ὑμῶν φιληταῖς ἀπανταχοῦ ἐξαιρόμενοι; ἀλλ' ἰστέον ἡμῖν, ὦ γεννάδαι, ὡς ἡ διαφορὰ τῶν διχρόνων ἢ τεχνική—τὰ λοιπὰ γὰρ λέγειν ἐῷ οὐ μέτροις καὶ συγγράμμασι λυσιτελεῖ—καὶ τοῖς καταλογάδην συγγράμμασι πολλαχοῦ καὶ πολλάκις καὶ ἐπανορθοῖ καὶ οὐκ ἐᾷ τοῦ λόγου τὴν προφορὰν ἐκφέρεσθαι βάρβαρον.¹⁰⁶

To make a mistake in the syntax of discourse is a solecism, but to make a mistake in syllable lengths, accentuation, and breathings is a barbarism. How could you who make mistakes in all these things not be called barbarians? You who in secret, in some dark corner, disparage me together with other people like you, while you are exalted everywhere by your birdbrained friends who are ignorant of letters.¹⁰⁷ Yet we must know, o noble readers, that the distinction of dichronic vowels is technical [i.e., grammatical]—for I will omit saying the rest of the things that are not useful for meters and prose works. In many places and on many occasions, it [sc. the difference between dichronic vowels] ensures the correctness of prose works and prevents the discourse from being uttered with barbarous pronunciation.

The grammatical rule Tzetzes explains in this digression concerns the correct accentuation of diminutives. The position of the accent depends on the length of the syllable in the stem of the word, the general rule being

101 See Agapitos, “John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners,” 11, n. 57 for refs.

102 On buffalo as a recurring term in Tzetzes' polemical rhetoric, see Agapitos, “John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners,” 11, 24–27, 33–34; on Tzetzes' criticism of schedographers, esp. 7–27. See also M. J. Luzzatto, *Tzetzes lettore di Tucide: Note autografe sul Codice Heidelberg Palatino Greco 252* (Bari, 1999), 18–20 and passim.

103 *Histories* 399, 12.223–40; see Agapitos, “John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners,” 19–21 for a translation and discussion of this passage. See also, e.g., *Commentary on Aristophanes' Wealth* ad 137.45–47, ed. L. Massa Positano (Groningen, 1960), where Tzetzes accuses ignorant grammarians of being *dichrona*-haters (μισοδιχρονοί) and abhorring the artful discourses of rhetoricians. For similar passages, see H. Hunger, “Zur Interpretation polemischer Stellen im Aristophanes-Kommentar des Johannes Tzetzes,” in *Κωμωδοτραγήματα: Studia Aristophanea viri Aristophanei W. J. W. Koster in honorem* (Amsterdam, 1967), 59–64.

104 *Commentary on Aristophanes' Wealth* ad 1098, 2–10, ed. Massa Positano.

105 A similar polemical digression on the relevance of dichronic vowels for correct accentuation is found in *Commentary on Aristophanes' Wealth* ad 137, ed. Massa Positano.

106 *Commentary on Aristophanes' Wealth* ad 1098, 52–69, ed. Massa Positano.

107 Aristophanes repeatedly uses *λάρος* (lit. “seagull”) for cheap demagogues (see, e.g., *Knights* 956 and *Clouds* 591).

that diminutives ending in *-ion* are proparoxytone if the stem contains a short vowel (e.g., θύρα [ṽ] / θύριον [ṽ]), but paroxytone if the stem contains a long vowel (e.g., ψυχή / ψυχίον). One thus needs to know whether a vowel is long or short, including the correct usage of dichronic vowels, in order to be able to pronounce diminutives with the accent in the correct place. To know these rules is not only relevant for those who compose verse, but also for writers of prose.

By calling ignorant grammarians barbarous, Tzetzes revives the dichotomy of the world into (superior) Hellenes and (inferior) barbarians. The label “barbarous,” then, is virtually synonymous with “boorish,” “uneducated,” “without manners,” etc.¹⁰⁸ Even if they ridicule Tzetzes behind closed doors and are praised by their ignorant friends in public,¹⁰⁹ these rustics should not be considered part of the educated social elite. In a linguistic context, however, “to speak like a barbarian” (βαρβαρίζειν) not only meant to speak a foreign tongue, but also, more specifically, to speak “without conformity to the habit of the blessed Hellenes.”¹¹⁰ The habit of the Hellenes here is the grammatical habit of the ancient Greek language, with “barbarism” (βαρβαρισμός) being the technical term for a grammatical mistake. The ancient and Byzantine grammatical traditions distinguish two types of grammatical mistake, as

mentioned in the passage quoted above: while a barbarism is a mistake in one word, in, for instance, its accentuation, aspiration, morphology, or orthography, a solecism (σολοικισμός) is a mistake in the syntax of an entire sentence.¹¹¹ Various grammatical treatises entitled *On How to Avoid Barbarisms and Solecisms* illustrate the centrality of these terms to the grammatical tradition. Among these treatises is a text by the twelfth-century grammarian Gregory of Corinth, often simply referred to as *On Syntax* but more completely entitled *On Syntax; or, On How Not to Commit Solecisms and Barbarisms*.¹¹² According to Gregory, “a barbarism occurs whenever for lack of skill, the pure Greek and technically correct word is corrupted and pronounced in a barbarous way.”¹¹³ For Tzetzes, too, “barbarous” is the opposite of τεχνικός in the sense of “according to the rules of the art of grammar.” In another digression in the *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth*, he wonders how it is possible that one confuses such completely different things as the barbarous and the technical, the neighing of horses and the song of Orpheus.¹¹⁴ Certain schedographers and fellow grammarians are unworthy of the title of τεχνικός or γραμματικός (“grammarian”) as they are ignorant of the basic rules of their trade.

The opposite of barbarism is *Hellenismos* (Ἑλληνισμός), the use of grammatically, idiomatically, and syntactically correct Greek, observing all the rules of the *technē*,¹¹⁵ which is what grammar education is all

108 See, e.g., *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Clouds* ad 46b (ἄγροικος προπαροξυτόνως ὁ ἀνόητος καὶ βάρβαρος καὶ ἀπαιδεύτος [ἄγροικος, if proparoxytone, means someone who is silly and barbarous and uneducated]), 135a (ἄμαθής: ἀπαιδεύτος, βάρβαρος τὸν τρόπον, ἄκοσμος καὶ ἀρύθμιστος [stupid: uneducated, barbarous in his manners, disorderly and unorganized]), 1256a (εὐηθικῶς καὶ ἀφελῶς καὶ βαρβάρως καὶ ἀνοήτως [in a foolish, naive, barbarous, and silly manner]), in *Scholia in Aristophanem*, fasc. 2: *Commentarium in Nubes*, ed. D. Holwerda (Groningen, 1960). For Tzetzes on “barbarity,” see also V. F. Lovato, “Hellenizing Cato? A Short Survey of the Concepts of Greekness, Romanity and Barbarity in John Tzetzes’ Work and Thought,” in *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Byzantine World, c. 300–1500 AD: Selected Papers from the XVII International Graduate Conference of the Oxford University Byzantine Society*, ed. K. Stewart and J. M. Wakeley (Oxford, 2016), 143–58.

109 Tzetzes sketches out the same situation in *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth* ad 137, 74–76 and 119–24, ed. Massa Positano, where he underscores that, unlike his barbarous critics, he writes according to the *technē*. He appears to have specific individuals and occasions in mind. Cf. *Hypothesis of Aristophanes’ Frogs* 9–22, in *Commentarium in Ranas et in Aves*, ed. Koster, with translation and discussion in van den Berg, “Playwright, Atticist, Satirist.”

110 See, e.g., *Suda* β 104 and σ 782: παρὰ τὸ ἔθος τῶν εὐδαιμονούντων Ἑλλήνων.

111 For the definitions of barbarism and solecism, see, e.g., *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth* ad 1098, 52–56, ed. Massa Positano.

112 Γεωργίου μητροπολίτου Κορίνθου τοῦ πρότερον Πάρδου ὀνομαζομένου περὶ συντάξεως τοῦ λόγου ἥτοι περὶ τοῦ μὴ σολοικίζειν καὶ βαρβαρίζειν (*On Syntax; or, On How Not to Commit Solecisms and Barbarisms*, by Gregory, Metropolitan of Corinth, Previously Called Pardos), in *Le traité Περὶ συντάξεως λόγου de Grégoire de Corinthe: Étude de la tradition manuscrite*, ed. and trans. D. Donnet (Brussels and Rome, 1967), 165. On Gregory’s *On Syntax*, see R. H. Robins, *The Byzantine Grammarians: Their Place in History* (Berlin, 1993), 163–72.

113 Gregory of Corinth, *On Syntax* 87: Ὁ βαρβαρισμός ἐν λέξει γίνεται ὅταν ἐξ ἀτεχνίας παραφθαρῇ ἡ ἑλληνικὴ καὶ τεχνικὴ λέξις καὶ βαρβάρως ἐκφωνηθῇ, ed. Donnet.

114 *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth* ad 137, 49–52, ed. Massa Positano. See also Hunger, “Zur Interpretation polemischer Stellen,” 60–61 (with further references for the opposition between barbarous and technical in n. 8).

115 For an extensive overview of *Hellenismos* in ancient Greek scholarship and further references, see L. Pagani, “Language Correctness (*Hellenismos*) and Its Criteria,” in *Brill’s Companion to*

about—scholiasts on Dionysius Thrax’s *Art of Grammar*, for instance, define *Hellenismos* as the telos of the art.¹¹⁶ To achieve this ultimate goal, one needs to learn the rules of grammar: Gregory tells his addressee that he will explain the canons (κανόνες) of declension and conjugation in order to provide archetypes or paradigms that will help determine the correct morphology of words when in doubt, so as to avoid barbarisms according to the principle of analogy.¹¹⁷ Tzetzēs implements the same principle of analogy in his explanation of the accentuation of diminutives, as he does in many other places: after stating the grammar rule in question, he gives relevant examples to serve as “archetypes.”¹¹⁸ With this knowledge one will be able to correctly pronounce all other diminutives ending in *-ion*.

Tzetzēs contrasts hardworking grammarians, who heed all rules of the art, with the careless, barbarous schedographers:¹¹⁹

τί δὲ γραμματικῆς λόγοις προσέχομεν ἰδρῶσι
πόνους μερίμναις, νύκτας ἀγρύπνους ἰαύοντες,
ἤματα αἵματόεντα διαπρήσσοντες, μὴ καθ’
Ἡσίοδον ἰλαδὸν ἀκμητὶ καὶ ῥαδίως μεταλαμβάνοιμεν
κακότητος, ἀτεχνίας καὶ βαναυσότητος·
ἀλλὰ ῥητορεύουσι μὲν καὶ ἡμῖν σκοπεῖται πᾶν
τεχνικὸν ῥητόρων λόγου δεινότητος μετρογραφούσι
τε χρόνων ἀκρίβεια συναμφοτέροις καὶ τοῖς συγγράμμασι
τοῖς τε καταλογάδην καὶ τοῖς ἡρμένοις μέτρων
ῥυθμοῖς, μὴ σόλοικον εἶτε βάρβαρον τῆς
ἁρμογῆς τοῦ λόγου τὴν φορὰν πλέξαιμεν.¹²⁰

Why do we pay attention to the rules of grammar with sweat, labor, and cares, spending sleepless nights and passing bloody days [*Iliad*

9.325–26], lest we—to speak as Hesiod does [*Works and Days* 287]—in abundance, without effort, and too easily partake of vice, lack of skill, and vulgarity. For when we are practicing oratory, we take into consideration every technicality of the skillfulness of speech of rhetoricians; when we write about meter, we take into consideration accurate syllable length both in prose writings and in works that are elevated by the rhythms of meters, lest we weave a solecism or barbarism into the force of the discursive arrangement.

There are no shortcuts to a perfect command of grammar: good grammarians toil long days and endure sleepless nights to avoid bad taste, lack of skill, and vice, both technical and moral, an idea once again supported by an allusion to Hesiod’s *Works and Day* (see also p. 294, above). While Hesiod only mentions vice (κακότης), Tzetzēs adds lack of skill (ἀτεχνία) and vulgarity (βαναυσότης) in order to indicate the kind of vice he is referring to: the lack of knowledge and sophistication in the *technē grammatikē* that is indicative of a low social position. While βάνανσος and cognates are used for what (and who) is vulgar, low, and mean in general, more specifically the term is connected to craftsmen and artisans,¹²¹ a social group that intellectuals looked down upon.

The allusion is again to the gnomic passage on virtue and vice in the *Works and Days*, where Hesiod writes that the immortal gods block access to virtue’s dwelling by “sweat” (ἰδρῶς).¹²² Tzetzēs, too, stresses the efforts needed to achieve technical virtue qua knowledge of grammar. In his exegesis of this Hesiodic passage, he specifies further which path one needs to follow to achieve “grammatical virtue” (γραμματικὴν ἀρετήν), a virtue that one does not possess instantaneously. Rather, the journey of grammar education begins with the study of letters, syllables, etc., then continues to Dionysius Thrax’s *Art of Grammar*, Theodosius’s *Canons*, and the

Ancient Greek Scholarship, 2 vols., ed. F. Montanari, S. Matthaios, and A. Rengakos (Leiden, 2015), 2:798–849.

116 See, e.g., scholia on Dionysius Thrax’s *Art of Grammar* 113.25–27, 170.21–25, 446.6; cf. 160.1–3, ed. Hilgard.

117 Gregory of Corinth, *On Syntax* 89, ed. Donnet. For analogy as a criterion of *Hellenismos*, see Pagani, “Language Correctness,” 832–39.

118 *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth* ad 1098, 70–76, ed. Massa Positano. On analogy in Tzetzēs’ grammar teaching, see also van den Berg, “Teaching Grammar with Poetry.”

119 See also, e.g., *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth* ad 137, 70–72, ed. Massa Positano.

120 *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth* ad 1098, 35–49, ed. Massa Positano.

121 See LSJ s.v. βάνανσος for refs. Tzetzēs uses the same term for the ignorant barbarians, e.g., in *Commentary on Aristophanes’ Wealth* ad 137, 106, ed. Massa Positano, and for his own simpler writings in the epilogue of the *Theogony* (749): see Agapitos, “John Tzetzēs and the Blemish Examiners,” 44.

122 Hesiod, *Works and Days* 289.

poets (in that order),¹²³ before reaching schedographic compositions—of the traditional kind rather than the “modern” excesses, we may assume.¹²⁴ “And after one has toiled much for a long time, one acquires virtue through effort and pain.”¹²⁵

In the prolegomena to his *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days*, Tzetzes reflects on the importance of hard work in the context of (grammar) education in his allegorical interpretation of Hesiod's relationship with the Muses. He relates how, according to tradition, Hesiod and his brother fell into poverty after the death of their parents. To make a living Hesiod became a goatherd on Mount Helicon, where he one day encountered nine young women who fed him with laurel and endowed him with poetic wisdom. Tzetzes explains that the account of Hesiod's poverty and profession is historically accurate, but the rest is a myth concealing an allegorical meaning. Whether in a dream or a waking vision, Hesiod came to realize that he should leave the hard and humble life of a goatherd to devote himself to learning (μαθήματα) and education (παιδευσίς). After much hard work (πόνος), he earned a good reputation and wrote many books, “which I consider a morsel of Muses or of knowledge,” contends Tzetzes.¹²⁶

Against all odds Hesiod thus managed to exchange his pitiable and anonymous existence for a semi-divine

status by virtue of his moral excellence and education. Tzetzes lists other examples of famous ancient figures with humble origins: Socrates was a stonemason, Euripides a greengrocer, Aesop and Epictetus were slaves, and Lucian was a stonemason and semi-slave.¹²⁷ These examples may have resonated on a personal level with Tzetzes,¹²⁸ who claims to have come from a second-rate aristocratic family and presents himself as an intellectual fighting poverty and struggling to acquire a position for himself in the competitive intellectual world of twelfth-century Constantinople.¹²⁹ Here, however, he does not explicitly connect these examples with his own situation, but uses them to encourage his students to pay due attention to their studies and work hard:

Ἐνθεν τοι μή τις τῶν νέων νωχελὴς καὶ ῥάθυμος,
καὶ ἀμβλὺς περὶ λόγους τελείτω, καὶ μονονουχὶ
καθευδέτω τοῖς περὶ τὸν Ἡσίοδον τοῦτον ἡπατη-
μένος μύθοις, καὶ παρ' αὐτὸν ἐπελθεῖν δαφνηφο-
ρούσας τινὰς παρθένους καραδοκῶν ψωμιζούσας
τὰς δάφνας, καὶ δεδυνημένας ἀκαριαίως σοφίζειν,
ἀλλὰ τῇ ἀλληγορίᾳ ταύτῃ προσέχων, καὶ πόνοις
προσκεείμενος, καὶ πάντας τούτους τοὺς προκει-
μένους ἔχων παράδειγμα, σπουδαιοτέρως ἀντε-
χέσθω τῶν λόγων, καὶ μόχθῳ τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῆς
σοφίας λαμβάνων ταμιεύετω ἐς τὸ προκόλπιον.
Παρθένους δὲ δαφνηφορούσας καὶ σοφίζουσας
ἀκαριαίως μηδεὶς ἐλπίζειτω· κἂν γὰρ καὶ παρὰ
τινας νῦν παρθένοι καὶ δαφνηφόροι ἀφίζωνται,

123 On Dionysius Thrax's *Art of Grammar* and Theodosius's *Canons* in Byzantine grammar education, see Ronconi, “Quelle grammaire à Byzance?,” 72–80 (with further refs.).

124 Anna Komnene, similarly, includes *schede* in the *enkyklios paideia*, while being critical of contemporary developments: see Agapitos, “Anna Komnene,” esp. 93–96.

125 *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* ad 285bis, ed. Gaisford: καὶ πολλὰ πολλοῖς μογήσας τοῖς χρόνοις, μόγις τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπικτᾶται.

126 *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* 14.3–15.6, ed. Gaisford. For Tzetzes' interpretation of the Muses qua the poet's knowledge and his treatise on the Muses (*Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days*, pp. 24–31.18, ed. Gaisford), see M. Cardin and O. Tribulato, “Enumerating the Muses: Tzetzes in *Hes. Op.* 1 and the Parody of Catalogic Poetry in Epicharmus,” in *Approaches to Greek Poetry: Homer, Hesiod, Pindar and Aeschylus in Ancient Exegesis*, ed. M. Ercoles et al. (Berlin, 2018), 161–92, esp. 162–74. See also F. Pontani, “Scholarship in the Byzantine Empire (529–1453),” in *Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 1:297–455, at 381 on *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* 29.13–30.1. Eustathios, too, interprets the Muse in Homer as the poet's own knowledge: see van den Berg, “Homer and Rhetoric in Byzantium,” 229–32 with further refs.

127 *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* 15.10–15, ed. Gaisford. For the tradition of Socrates as sculptor or stonemason, see, e.g., Pausanias, 1.22.8; *Suda* σ 829. For Euripides, see, for instance, Aristophanes, who ridicules the tragic poet for being the son of a lady greengrocer in *Acharnians* 457–78 and *Knights* 19; see also *Suda* δ 752 and σ 536. On Aesop, see *Suda* αἰ 334; on Epictetus, ε 2424. On Lucian, see his autobiographical piece *The Dream, or Lucian's Career*.

128 In a similar vein Tzetzes identifies with the learned yet underappreciated Palamedes: see, e.g., V. F. Lovato, “Portrait de héros, portrait d'érudit: Jean Tzetzes et la tradition des *eikonismoi*,” in *Medioevo Greco* 17 (2017): 137–56, at 143–50; Pizzone, “Autobiographical Subject,” 299–300. Aristophanes' biography, too, resonated with Tzetzes: both toiled for others, while their achievements remained without acknowledgment: see van den Berg, “Playwright, Atticist, Satirist.” On Tzetzes and Homer, see E. Cullhed, “The Blind Bard and ‘I’: Homeric Biography and Authorial Personas in the Twelfth Century,” *BMGS* 38, no. 1 (2014): 49–67, at 58–67.

129 On Tzetzes' intellectual and social position, see Grünbart, “Byzantinisches Gelehrtenelend.”

γυμνάσουσι τούτον, ἀλλ' οὐ σοφίσουσιν. ἐνθὲν τε πάντες νέοι πονεῖτε, καθάπερ Ἡσίοδος, καὶ δῶρα δρέψασθε μουσῶν, ὡς ἐκεῖνος, καὶ δάφνας ἀμαράντους ἐλικωνίτιδας.¹³⁰

Therefore no young person should be sluggish, careless, and spiritless when it comes to learning, and he should not be all but asleep, deceived by the myths about this Hesiod and expecting that some laurel-bringing maidens will approach him and feed him with the laurel, having the power to make him wise instantly. Rather, paying attention to this allegory and devoting himself to labor, and with all the above-mentioned authors as examples, he should care for learning with more earnest, and after receiving the treasures of wisdom through toil, he should store them in his breast-pocket. No one should hope for maidens who bring laurel and provide untimely wisdom: for even if maidens and laurel-bearers approach someone nowadays, they will exercise him, but not make him wise. Therefore, all of you young students should labor, as Hesiod did, and pluck gifts from Muses, as he did, and unfading laurel from Mount Helicon.

I have quoted this passage in full as an example of how Tzetzes bridges the gap between the ancient text and the educational world of the twelfth century, how he makes Hesiod relevant for contemporary students—and not without a touch of humor. Readers should get to work should they wish to become as successful as Hesiod was.¹³¹ They should not count on beautiful maidens feeding them with the laurel of wisdom; the latter may still visit gentlemen, yet they give them a different kind of “exercise.”



Back-and-forth criticism was part and parcel of the competition among grammarians in twelfth-century

Constantinople—accusing a competitor of philological ignorance or using wrong or “barbarous” Greek was an effective weapon in discrediting this person as a qualified teacher.¹³² Asserting one’s own expertise is simply the other side of the same coin. Tzetzes’ criticism of his predecessors and contemporaries opens a window onto his ideas on the good teacher: effective teaching, in verse as well as prose, needs accuracy, clarity, and brevity, not polished language or sophisticated syntax. Rather than making a groundbreaking contribution to science, a teacher’s task is to make material from other sources available in a convenient and, especially for verse, pleasant manner. Tzetzes’ criticism of predecessors for talking nonsense or presenting confusing accounts leaves us with the impression that only with Tzetzes as a teacher will we learn everything clearly and accurately, an impression that he is all too eager to spell out explicitly.

Whom we should definitely not turn to are the schedographers and other dichronic-vowel-hating grammarians of Tzetzes’ time, whom he accuses of philological ignorance and deliberate negligence of the rules of the *technē*. A systematic study of such criticism along with the grammar lessons in Tzetzes’ works can reveal much about what one of the most prolific grammarians of the twelfth century defines as excellent language—knowing how to use dichronic vowels is certainly part of it. Tzetzes considers the use of correct Greek, including correct prosody, a question of intellectual as well as social and moral standing. True grammatical virtue, closely related to moral virtue, is the result of diligent study and hard work. Even though this may be a heartfelt plea against what Tzetzes felt to be the contemporary deterioration of the Greek language and language education, it is at the same time a plea for studying with Tzetzes.

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130 *Commentary on Hesiod’s Works and Days* 15.19–16.8, ed. Gaisford.

131 In his adhortatory discourse Christopher Zonaras (see p. 291 and n. 54, above) similarly encourages his son to devote due attention to his studies and persevere through trial and error.

132 Agapitos, “John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners,” 5.

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